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QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (ROSTER)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[27 December 1990]

1. The International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements (FIMARC) has, on the basis of a well-tried practice of field surveys among the persons most concerned, with particular attention at the present time to human rights violations in rural areas and faithful to the objective of "action to achieve development based on solidarity and respect for the dignity of man, his culture and nature" as defined by its World Assembly, attended by delegates from 4 continents and 40 countries and held in November 1990 in Albergaria, Portugal, heard the complaints and appeals and taken account of the efforts and resolutions of the world's most threatened rural populations, i.e. peasants with small and medium-sized farms in the countries of the North and, above all, the most impoverished in the countries of the South.

2. In compliance with its mandate as a participant in the forty-seventh session of the Commission on Human Rights, FIMARC draws the attention of Governments to the tragic conditions in which their people live in rural areas and to the increasingly aggressive violations of the right to development, which was clearly spelled out and decided on at the forty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights in 1988 in the following terms: "the main objective is to guarantee each peasant family an adequate income to meet its basic needs and live in dignity while also ensuring the community's self-sufficiency in food" (E/CN.4/1988/NGO/5).

3. It is clear to FIMARC that this objective is not only far from having been achieved, but that there are increasingly larger numbers of obstacles to its attainment, affecting in particular "the right to live in dignity while also ensuring the community's self-sufficiency in food".

4. It may well be asked whether the right to live in dignity still has any meaning when the right to life of unborn children, nursing babies and adolescents is being violated for various reasons, the main one being the increasingly widespread poverty of rural populations, which is directly responsible for the mass exodus of peasant families who are adding to the destitution in shanty towns and favelas.

5. At its World Assembly, FIMARC analysed the immediate causes of this poverty and vigorously denounced:

(a) Land grabbing by large landowners, multinational corporations and land speculators, all more or less in connivance with States which obstinately refuse to implement the necessary agrarian reforms to guarantee the peasant community's right to food self-sufficiency;

(b) The public debt, which is crushing the rural population and depriving it of what is left of its purchasing power, already weakened by the constant drop in the prices of coffee, cocoa and sugar. In the industrialized countries where agriculture is regularly sacrificed at the expense of the other sectors of the national economy, the increasingly rapid disappearance of small and medium-sized family farms is being referred to as the disastrous result of increasing over-indebtedness, which is in turn attributable to speculation on the price of agricultural land, the constantly rising cost of equipment, the expansionism of large farms and the increase in soil-less cultivation (most of which is under contract to international agribusiness);

(c) The slump of agricultural prices to below production costs, the rise in mortgage rates and milk and meat quotas, which have meant that a growing number of farmers have been ruined or forced to give up. The hunger strike by French peasants on account of their unsold surpluses was cited and a photograph shown of a Sudanese peasant woman watching her child die of hunger.

6. FIMARC regards these tragic examples of violations of the right to live, in dignity and the right to full development as challenges to be met. It wants to publicize the testimony of delegates to its World Assembly in order to draw attention to its resolutions, the background to which is clearly acceptance by the peasants themselves of responsibility for defending their rights - often at the cost of their lives.

7. In some countries, repression is still the answer by the State and the unofficial police forces to those who dare demand agrarian reform, equitable land distribution and the right to organize unions and co-operatives. "As I stand here among you", said a Latin American peasant, "my companions are being threatened with death and some of them may have already died". A delegate from South-East Asia said, "someone else was supposed to come here, not I, but he is in prison. He was too involved in the union".

8. The resistance and grass-roots initiatives nevertheless join forces

(a) Rural communities are organizing to establish or strengthen their own self-defence mechanisms; to begin raising food crops and diversifying their food; to provide training and institute self-management in small production units; to take over the marketing of their products; and to stand united in local, national and international bodies and to establish a genuine dialogue with them. Many activities which the delegates are proud to describe have been carried out in villages and districts;

(b) In Chad, a Sahelian country which is seriously affected or threatened by drought each year, young persons pool their resources to clear the bush, sow it and build a community grain store in which to keep millet and thus guarantee food self-sufficiency from one season to the next. The problem that still has to be settled in co-operation with the authorities is that of the annual invasion and destruction of crops by flocks belonging to nomadic tribes. In the hope that this problem will be solved, they and delegates from other countries such as Senegal, Burkina Faso and Cameroon, have raised it at the international level;

(c) In a rural region in Egypt, 16 projects have been started up by groups working to promote literacy through specific activities such as the establishment of handicraft workshops for young people, centres for the advancement of women, kindergartens and five new dispensaries;

(d) In Uruguay, as part of efforts to improve family rights, a campaign has been organized by rural community centres to develop awareness of respect for the right to life, responsible parenthood and birth control and birth control methods, taking care to respect the mentality of each ethnic group, its culture and its beliefs;

(e) In southern India, a campaign is being carried out to develop grass-roots awareness through plays which a group of peasants mimes and sings in villages to change its brothers' resigned or fatalistic attitude towards the growing poverty of the rural population and the exodus of young people, which are the disastrous consequences of unfair land distribution;

(f) In western Europe, and particularly in Switzerland, where the main concern is the alarming disappearance of family farms, the peasants' reaction, which began as long as 15 years ago, has been to organize committees against injustice in matters involving land and to adopt initiatives for joint guarantee funds on behalf of small and medium-sized farmers to prevent land speculation. In France and in Belgium, where environmental deterioration is more and more a matter of concern to the rural population, awareness of the problem has led farmers to mobilize and demonstrate against industrial and intensive agriculture, as well as against unauthorized deposits of waste, especially nuclear waste. European delegations also referred to rural groups which are determined to find a solution through alternative agriculture in close co-operation with consumers seeking quality products.

CONCLUSION

9. All of these reactions and initiatives by the movements from four continents which took part in the FIMARC World Assembly reflect their growing

awareness not only of their right to development, but also of what they regard as their right to full development, i.e.:

(a) Development in which men and women are actively involved in defining, deciding and implementing their own projects, which respect their identity as rural dwellers, their personal and community values and their pace and methods of work and which are shared with the poorest, excluding no one;

(b) Development involving access to knowledge of regional, national and international economic and political mechanisms and the organized support of associations which serve as a counterbalance to authority.

10. Lastly, FIMARC advocates new forms of international solidarity in order to keep the rural population dense enough to allow for a wide range of occupations and, thus, for genuine interdependent development.